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ABSTRACT

This brief report highlights the issues, evidence, and first steps toward including students with disabilities in educational data systems. The report notes that if students with disabilities are excluded from educational data collection systems, policy makers do not have an adequate set of information from which to make policy decisions. The report lists points at which exclusion occurs, and states that an estimated 40% to 50% of school-age students with disabilities are excluded from such national data collection programs as National Assessment of Educational Progress and the National Education Longitudinal Study. The report points out that estimates of exclusion in state assessment programs are largely unavailable. Steps toward including students are listed, such as developing assessment modifications, accommodations, or alternatives; increasing inclusion of students with disabilities during instrument development; and developing more inclusive definitions of sample eligibility. (JDD)

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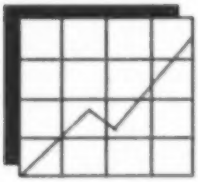
Including Students with Disabilities in National and State Data Collection Programs



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BRIEF REPORT
1

National Center on Educational Outcomes

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

March, 1992

EC 301441

2

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"Out of Sight is Out of Mind"

It is a common phenomenon in our busy world -- that which we don't see is often forgotten. Within the current emphasis on educational reform and greater educational accountability, the inclusion of individuals with disabilities is minimal. Our nation is relying to a great extent on existing national and state data collection systems to document the status of students, even though students with disabilities are not adequately represented. The dangers of excluding students with disabilities are many, ranging from equal access issues to educational accountability issues. This Brief Report highlights the issues, evidence, and first steps toward including students with disabilities in our educational data systems.

ISSUE: If students with disabilities are excluded from educational data collection systems, then we do not have an adequate set of information from which to make policy decisions. Furthermore:

- Exclusion perpetuates the myth of inherent differences.
- Exclusion interferes with the formation of representative samples for evaluating the status of students in schools today.
- Exclusion decreases the validity of estimates of important statistics, such as school dropout rates.
- Exclusion does not reflect the valuing of individuals with disabilities that is evident in other aspects of America's educational programs.

EVIDENCE: Both national and state data collection systems are excluding large portions of the population of students with disabilities. A sizable portion of these students should not have been excluded, and could readily participate (some with testing accommodations, others without).

✔ Exclusion occurs at many different points:
- When standards are set and outcomes are defined.
- During the development of assessment instruments.
- When the sampling frame is selected.
- When the data are collected.
- During analysis, interpretation, and reporting of results.

✔ An estimated 40% to 50% of school-age students with disabilities are excluded from prominent national data collection programs such as

NAEP: "National Assessment of Educational Progress" -- designed to monitor the knowledge, skills, understanding, and attitudes of the nation's children and youth. The program currently assesses different curriculum areas (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics, etc.) in grades 4, 8, and 12 every two years.

NELS: "National Education Longitudinal Study" -- designed to assess students every two years from 1988 when they were in eighth grade to 1996. The program collects data in a range of areas, including work status, school performance, after-school activities, life goals, etc.

✔ Estimates of exclusion in state assessment programs are largely unavailable at this time, generally because many states do not keep track of this information. Even though criteria may exist for deciding who to exclude from data collection programs, these are implemented in uncontrolled ways, usually at the local school level (e.g., John is excluded because he might cry; Mary is excluded because her test scores will pull down the school's score; etc).

STEPS TOWARD INCLUDING STUDENTS: Not all of the 4 1/2 million students with disabilities can participate in national and state assessments as they currently exist. For some students, alternatives to current procedures are needed. But many students with disabilities can be included in current national and state data collection programs. Ways to make this happen include:

- ✔ Adhering to inclusion guidelines.
- ✔ Developing assessment modifications, accommodations, or alternatives that allow more students with disabilities to participate in large-scale data collection programs.
- ✔ Increasing inclusion of students with disabilities during instrument development.
- ✔ Including separate schools and special programs for students with disabilities in data collection sampling plans.
- ✔ Developing more inclusive definitions of sample eligibility.
- ✔ Conducting follow-up studies and special analyses of students considered ineligible to participate in data collection programs, both to document their characteristics and to check future eligibility.

We don't want students with disabilities to be "out of mind" because they are "out of sight" in our national and state assessment programs.

The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) was established in October, 1990 to work with state departments of education, national policy-making groups, and others to facilitate and enrich the development and use of indicators of educational outcomes for students with disabilities. The Center represents a collaborative effort of the University of Minnesota, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, and St. Cloud State University. The Center is supported through a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (H159C00004). Opinions or points of view do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. Department of Education or Offices within it.

Brief Report 1 is based on a longer report prepared by McGrew, Thurlow, Shriner, and Spiegel (Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in National and State Data Collection Programs), which is available from the NCEO Publications Office (cost is $10.00).

Copies of this Brief Report can be obtained for $1.00 each (bulk prices available) from

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